

## **CREATIVE THINKING AMONG TODAY'S MUSLIMS: BARRIERS AND BREAKTHROUGHS**

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### **Abstract:**

Creative thinking and problem solving is of extreme concerns in the Western research for the last half century. The findings of these researches are being implemented and applied in all walks of life: education, administration, leadership, etc. Not only that, it is used in political mobilization, advertisement, propaganda, mind-leading, influencing attitudes through perceptual manipulation and even as a powerful tool to promote Globalization throughout the whole World.

Compared to the above and by looking at the situation in the Muslim World today, we find awkwardness, backwardness, and narrow-mindedness. Many intellectuals who observed such dangerous negative phenomenon raised questions and inquiries. What has happened to the Muslims of today? What are the reasons behind all these traits and qualities? Why Muslims – who are considered as one of the builders of civilizations -are no longer creative and initiative? How to reactivate creative potential in Muslims so as to revive the vibrant Islamic Thought and reestablish the Islamic Civilization?

This paper aims to explore the external barriers and obstacles that hinder creative thinking among today's Muslims. Environmental, Educational, and Intellectual barriers will be analyzed and discussed thoroughly. Ways, means and strategies to overcome such barriers will be highlighted. An analytical and critical approach will be used in dealing with issues related to the topic. Both inductive and abductive reasoning will be combined in discussing the above-mentioned barriers. Views of some contemporary Muslim scholars such as Malik Bin Nabi, Iqbal and Abdul Karim Bakkar, to name a few, will be introduced and examined.

It is of significance and importance to relate and compare findings with the Western perspective, which had been established and improved for the last three decades. The researcher will include his input based on his experience in teaching the subject of Creative Thinking at IIUM for the last eight years.

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It is highly expected that the findings of this paper will be beneficial to the Muslim community and it is hoped that it will contribute to the development of the Contemporary Islamic Thought which possibly can –in turn- contribute to the development of the Muslim “Ummah”.

The researcher will use the Western research findings on creativity with special regard to environmental, cultural, and educational barriers to creativity, as a unit of analysis to evaluate the situation in the Muslim World. This is due to following reasons:

1. The accumulation of research done on creativity in the West for the last three decades or more;
2. Major similarities in educational system, in both the Muslim World and the West to a certain extent, where most if not all the Muslim countries adopted UNESCO educational settings after decolonization.

However, the researcher will not use the above said criteria in a passive and submissive sense, especially in discussing cultural and environmental barriers, where there are more differences than similarities. The findings of the Western researches will be thoroughly examined in their application to the Muslim context.

In an attempt to overcome these barriers, the paper will introduce the views of some eminent Muslim scholars and examine these views in the light of the paper’s findings as a way of concluding and reaching the final resolutions .

### **1) Introduction:**

The early writings on creativity in the West focused on barriers to creativity. James Adams was one of the authors who wrote on this issue and his book entitled "Conceptual Blockbusting"<sup>(1)</sup> can be considered among the first efforts. According to Adams, barriers to creativity can be generally classified into perceptual, emotional, cultural, environmental, intellectual and expressive. Based on his view, one has to break through all these barriers in order to conceptualize freely and to be creative.

Gary Davis who wrote 20 years later classifies barriers into internal and external: "Barriers are blocks, internal or external, that either inhibit creative thinking and inspiration or else prevents innovative ideas from being accepted and implemented. Most barriers result from

learning. They may originate with one's family, peers, community, or educational environment, or from others in the culture or business organizations."<sup>(1)</sup> Davis stresses:

"Because of their insecurities, well-learned habits, or an unsupportive or even repressive environment, most people do not use the creative abilities with which they were born" <sup>(2)</sup>.

Barriers according to him are habit and learning, rules and traditions, perceptual, cultural, emotional, and resource barriers "shortage of people, money, time, supplies, or information ."

Although he considers Learning and Habit, as necessary capabilities for humankind in directing our daily behavior, however, they are the most obvious barriers; they both are a blessing and a curse. He explains: "The most obvious barriers to creative thinking and innovation simply is habit – our well – learned ways of thinking and responding. It begins early. We learn "correct" responses, routines, and patterns of behavior. We learn language habits and conceptual categories. We learn "the way things have always been done" and "the way things are supposed to be done." Over the years it becomes difficult to see and create new possibilities – to break away from or suppress our creativity- squelching habits."<sup>(1)</sup>.

Next come Rules and Regulations: "As with learning and habit, social groups – from one's family to educational, corporate, national, and international groups – could not function without the rules, regulations, policies, and traditions that guide personal, social, and institutional conduct. However, "guide" often means restrict, inhibit, or prohibit."<sup>(2)</sup>.

It is clear that barriers are of two types: Internal and external. However, this paper will concentrate on discussing and analyzing external barriers, and finding ways and means to overcome them, for the following reasons:

1. External barriers are more influential for they affect the individual as well as the whole community .
2. Overcoming external barriers to creativity will lead to promoting creative culture and can help individuals to overcome their internal barriers.

Based on previous quotations taken from studies and research work done in this regard, cultural, educational and environmental barriers are the main and the most influential barriers that hinder creativity. In the following discussion the paper will analyze, elucidate and highlight these barriers one by one .

## **Cultural Barriers**

Culture here is regarded as a broader aspect of the social environment. According to Gary Davis again: "Cultural barriers amount to social influence, expectations, and conformity pressures which are based on social and institutional norms. Cultural blocks include habit and learning, rules and traditions, and more. They include conforming to the ways we think others expect us to behave and a fear of being different. The result is a loss of individuality and creativity" <sup>(1)</sup> .

He gives the following examples: the traditionally perceived role of females, we learn not to ask too many questions, and that fantasy is a waste of time, and if cooperation is an accepted cultural or institutional goal, many people will temper their creative ideas in order to "fit in" and ignoring monumental cultural differences in creative attitudes and personality, creative productivity, creative opportunity, and general self-actualization where the culture itself becomes the greatest cultural barrier .

There are differences between cultures in terms of importance and significance given to creativity. The more a culture allows, promotes, and encourages creativity the more this will influence attitudes of that culture citizens to become creative. Dacey says :

Cultures vary in the relative importance given to creativity. Also, Wonder and Blake "1992" argue that the Eastern view centers on artistic, poetic, and everyday life domains of creative activity because people can draw upon their own experiences in these domains<sup>(1)</sup>

Islam in this sense highly values and encourages deep thinking, contemplation, reflection and pondering. The Qur'an used more than eight terminologies for thinking while calling and encouraging all its readers to exercise it. This is mentioned in hundreds of verses. Both the Qur'an and Sunnah used more than fifteen different thinking styles in communicating their message. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) highly recommended innovating something which is good and beneficial to the community.<sup>(2)</sup>

A culture may encourage creativity in specific domains but not in other ones. "Culture encourages creativity in some situations and for some topics but discourages it for others. For example, Mar'i and Karayanni "1983" observed that many Arab students' responses to the question, "What would happen if mules and other animals which help us plow the farm

cease to exist?” were elaborate and original! However, a religious question “What would happen if worship places cease to exist?” yield shallow responses or those that rejected the question.”<sup>(1)</sup>

Mar’i and Karayanni argued that in Arab cultures males tend to perform better than females on creativity tasks. They attributed this observation to females’ submissive social role, limited occupational choices, and/or limited schooling opportunities in Arab culture. “Differential opportunities for schooling may be particularly important to consider when examining gender-based differences in creativity because schools familiarize students with testing situations.”<sup>(2)</sup>

In my opinion, what Mar’i and Karayanni attributed the Arab students’ shallow responses when asked about worship places seems to suggest that creativity is not linked to religion in many Muslim countries. There are among teachers who teach religious subjects who believe that there is no link between Islam and creativity to the extent that some of them think that Islam is anti-creativity. I was told by some Muslim school teachers’ participants in the 8th International Conference on Thinking in Singapore in June 1997 that, even though they were willing to promote and teach Creative Thinking at their universities, the most objection and opposition to the project was surprisingly coming from religious oriented lecturers .

A culture may favor a gender over another in terms of educational opportunities and setting the role they ought to play in the community. “Mar’i and Karayanni “1983” have argued that in Arab cultures males tend to perform better than females on creativity tasks, which may be attributed to females’ submissive social role, limited occupational choices, and/or limited schooling opportunities. Differential opportunities for schooling may be particularly important to consider when examining gender-based differences in creativity because schools familiarize students with testing situations.”<sup>(1)</sup>

It is sadly true that females have much less educational opportunities in the Muslim World, where being educated may not be regarded as part of their human rights. Many recent International institutes’ findings and statistics prove that this fact still stands true until today! According to UN statistics, in 2003, an estimated 44 million adult Arab women were illiterate. <sup>(2)</sup>

In other Muslim countries the situation is more or less the same. UN statistics division data shows that the percentage of illiteracy among females in Bangladesh is up to 80%.

This can be looked at as part of the female role in many Muslim cultures and subcultures. In some Muslim communities females are raised up to be ready for getting married one day and take care of their children, husband and home. Unfortunately, this image is being promoted through media and movies as a source of entertainment! However, there are many other related factors behind such disaster some of which are the following :

1. Poverty where there are millions of Muslims who live in a status under the poverty line. In rural areas family prefer to send their male children to school and request female children to stay home and help the family to survive .
2. Wars and political instability in some Muslim countries such as Palestine.
3. Insufficient planning and lack of schools and colleges in many rural areas in some Muslim countries where it is easier for male students to go and study in the city or town .

As part of the culture, language plays a very important role in promoting creativity. Modes of expressions, choices of terms, the way of understanding or looking at the world, and even definitions of specific concepts are all influenced and shaped through language. In this respect mastering more than one language is considered a blessing .

Related to the effects of culture on creativity, described earlier, is the channeling influence of language on creativity, Whorf “1956” proposed that language shapes thought. Language structures categories and expresses a culture’s understanding of the world “Lakoff & Johnson, 1980”. Language as a vehicle of culture can therefore be expected to shape creativity. Several studies have assessed the effect that language has on creativity by contrasting monolingual and bilingual groups. A recent review of 24 studies – “but not including all studies” -concluded that a majority of the studies show a positive link between bilingualism and creativity.”<sup>(1)</sup>

The Worldview related to a culture may cause it either to promote or hinder creativity. “In addition to culture’s role in channeling creativity toward certain domains or social groups,

culture may influence the overall level of creative activity. Creativity may be stimulated or hindered by cultural features such as worldview and the value placed on conformity or tradition .

Worldview refers to a culture's broad conception of the nature of the world and people's role in the world "Sadowsky, Maguire, Johnson, Ngumba, & Kohles, 1994". For example, the U.S. worldview has been characterized, in part, as emphasizing individualism, a work ethic of accomplishment and achievement, and a belief in progress and a better future "Spindler & Spindler, 1983"<sup>(1)</sup> Asking the reader to consider each component with regard to creativity, the writer continues :

'Individualist cultures value independence, self reliance, and creativity, whereas collectivist cultures emphasize obedience, cooperation, duty, and acceptance of an in-group authority '

The writer then illustrates the impact of the work ethic of accomplishment and achievement on fostering creativity in the West. "Concerning a work ethic of accomplishment and achievement, we have already seen how the Western definition of creativity focuses on tangible creative products. The value placed on being active and productive should foster creativity as measured by Western standards ".

Highlighting few beliefs related to the Western World View, the writer shows how these beliefs can inspire people to work on improving the World. "With regard to a belief in progress and optimism toward the future, theorists have proposed that cultures with such beliefs empower people to work on improving the world "Arieti, 1976; Trachtman, 1975". These beliefs imply a cultural acceptance of change, growth, and movement from the status quo. Those cultures that do not maintain faith in progress and have a pessimistic view of the future are believed to stifle creativity in general."<sup>(1)</sup>

It can be argued that the Islamic worldview with its main components of: comprehensive interpretation of worshipping Allah "“Ubudiyyah”, to establish civilization on earth “khilafa”, the call for doing things with perfection, tastefulness, competitiveness, and in a complete manner

“Ihsan”, is an ideal worldview for promoting creativity. It is a unique worldview, which is misunderstood or misinterpreted by its followers and opponents as well .

Fate is one of the most important elements in the Islamic Worldview However, believing in Fate in a positive way is a missing dimension in Muslims’ beliefs and practices. Most Muslims fail to understand the Islamic stand with regard to fate. Islam emphasizes responsibility, planning, and action. It abandons recklessness, carelessness, and laziness. Though Islam calls for collectivity, unity, obedience and cooperation; it never neglects, ignores or eliminates individuality .

Cooperation means community solidarity, teamwork, supporting one another in whatever is good and beneficial but not submitting to the will of others. Islam safeguarded the practice of this concept positively by making it obligatory to exercise mutual consultation, giving advice “Nasiha”, encouraging what is good and discouraging what is evil. Obedience means respect and appreciation rather than authoritarianism. It is the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of these concepts that cause anti creativity .

In addition to varying worldviews and related to the individualism-collectivism dimension, cultures vary on the extent to which they value conformity and tradition. A few cross-cultural studies show links between levels of conformity or dogmatism/ open-mindedness and creativity.<sup>(1)</sup>

Usually and in most cultures, tradition is preferable to change. Many individuals value tradition more than the do change. This attitude has a negative effect on good conceptualization.

Culture can be either unselfconscious or self-conscious. The unselfconscious culture is tradition oriented, whereas in a self-conscious culture very high value seems to be placed on innovation.<sup>(2)</sup> “The problem arises when individuals become so universally in favor of tradition that they cannot see the need for and desirability of change in specific area.”<sup>(1)</sup> Another cultural issue, which influences creativity, is political stability. The more stability there is the more chances for creativity. “Political fragmentation “measured by the prevalence of independent nations”, for example, had a catalyzing effect on creativity across historical periods in Western, Islamic, and Indian civilizations.”<sup>(2)</sup>



Islamic contemporary history, after the decline of Othmanite Emperor and a long period of Western colonization shows a great deal of political instability, fragmentation, disunity and poverty. This adds to the barriers to creativity in the Muslim World. It led to migration of thousands of well-educated Muslim intellectuals and professionals to the West where there is a better chance for living .

Culture can set up people preferences, and thus certain intellectual concepts and attitudes are favored, “Reason, logic, numbers, utility, and practicality are good; but so, too, are feeling intuition, qualitative judgment, and pleasure especially if you are conceptualizing. This block against emotion, feeling; pleasure stems from our puritan heritage and our technology-based culture... One cause for this block, which has complicated matters in the past but is hopefully dying out a little, has been the assigning of various mental activities and qualities to either the male or the female. In the past, it has been the female who was to be sensitive, emotional, appreciative of the fine arts, and intuitive. The male was to be tough, physical, pragmatic, logical, and professionally productive. Adhering to these constraints severely limits both sexes.”<sup>(1)</sup>

Arieti proposes nine features that he believes are essential to the creativogenic society: the availability of culture and certain physical means, openness to cultural stimuli, stress on becoming not just being, free access to cultural media for all citizens, without discrimination, freedom, or even moderate discrimination, after severe oppression or absolute exclusion, exposure to different and even contrasting cultural stimuli, tolerance for and interest in diverging views, the opportunity for interaction between significant persons, and the promotion of incentives and awards.<sup>(2)</sup>

### **Educational Barriers**

Some researchers relate the lack of creativity in society to education.<sup>(3)</sup> It is astonishing to see how many well-known creative people hated school or did poorly in it. Besides, there is a surprisingly high proportion of very creative adults who had miserable educational experience.<sup>(4)</sup>

Dacey states that ‘schools suppress creativity’.<sup>(1)</sup> He argues that students after they have attended school for a while become more cautious and less innovative. Worst of all, they tend to change from being participators to being spectators.”<sup>(2)</sup>

These researchers assume that appropriate learning conditions can promote at least some elements of creativity in many if not all children. Universities, schools, and other education institutions therefore, must promote flexibility, openness for the new, the ability to adapt or see new ways of doing things, and courage in the face of the unexpected. It is hoped that this will help people to adapt to a changing world. <sup>(3)</sup>

Early researches show that teachers prefer courteousness, punctuality, obedience and receptiveness to other people’s “teachers” ideas. In the area of thinking, high skill in memorization and accurate recall are often preferred to critical thinking or independent decision making. These researches mention Nigeria and Turkey where this teacher bias has also been demonstrated.<sup>(4)</sup>

Based on my eight years of teaching Creative Thinking subject at Iium to students of Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge, and Human Sciences; I noticed that the students have difficulty in absorbing and visualizing the creative thinking concepts and skills. This might be due to the teaching methods used in their previous schools which might prefer spoon feeding approach and usually depend on memorizing and recalling information from ready to put hands on materials or notes for final exam. Many of those students fail to read additional recommended materials and reluctant to do extra exercises even when they encouraged and asked to do so. Besides, they prefer group over individual assignments, where some of them will be dependent on the other group members. We cannot blame them rather the culture that produced such negative intellectual behavior.

Amabile names four methods for what she calls killing children’s creativity in school. They are namely: evaluation, reward, competition, and restricted choice. Children who expect frequent teacher evaluation of their work will tend to be less motivated and creative. If children come to feel that these rewards are the main reasons for doing what they do, their creativity will be undermined. Competition encompasses both evaluation and reward. Competition occurs when people feel that their performance will be evaluated against the performance of others and that the best will receive some reward. It is a daily fact of life and, unfortunately, it can murder

creativity. Finally, learning and creativity could not be promoted by force in a highly restricted environment. It is surprising that most teachers unwittingly undermine creativity by restricting children's choice even in areas where they could allow more autonomy.<sup>(1)</sup>

Under Teacher Attitudes Amabile says that 'Research shows that teacher's orientation toward control can have a significant impact on children's intrinsic motivation. In one study, children showed low levels of motivation if their teachers were controlling, and high levels of motivation if their teachers allowed them more autonomy. It makes sense, then, to expect that there will be lower levels of creativity in classrooms with control-oriented teachers'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Professor Adams holds similar view in this respect, "Students from a school system in which grading is extremely important, and in which the professor or teacher is an extreme authority figure, sometimes have difficulty in adapting to design courses. They are often preoccupied with "What is the answer?" and "How do I ensure that I will get an A?" – as well they should be, since their background has been exclusively oriented in such directions. The tragedy is that many foreign countries that need capable designers and problem-solvers suffer from such blocks. Academic risk-taking is somewhat of a taboo."<sup>(2)</sup>

The problem can be in the way information is processed, Amabile explains, "It is possible, though, for creativity to be stifled by knowledge that is stored in the wrong way. One of the wrong ways for knowledge to be stored is rote learning, or memorizing facts without any sense of how they connect to each other. Such knowledge may be very useful for getting grades on multiple-choice tests, but it will be nearly useless for turning out truly creative work."<sup>(1)</sup> Also: "Teachers are not the only creativity killers in school. Children can undermine each other's creativity through pressure to conform."<sup>(2)</sup>

According to Dacey, it is deduced from researches that teachers' personality are characterized by 'authoritarianism'. 'Authoritarian want instant obedience from those "below" them... Dominance and subordination are the key factors in life for them'.<sup>(3)</sup> 'The whole educational system is involved. In addition, the question of why some school teachers are so authoritarian "and thus anti-creative" still remains'.<sup>(4)</sup> 'Clearly, some people go into teaching in order to dominate others, and some people do it in order to help their students to flourish. That there may be more of the former seems to be evidenced by the decline we see in creative scores

the longer children are in school'.<sup>(5)</sup> 'What are parents and teachers to do when their potentially creative children chafe within the school system? One answer is to try to change that system, to make it flexible enough to accommodate a variety of learning styles and interests'.<sup>(6)</sup>

Teachers should be trained to cultivate creativity in their students. Dacey reasoned that the teacher's inability to cultivate creativity probably results from deeply learned attitudes and values, and thus it would take substantial time and effort to overcome these unconscious biases."<sup>(1)</sup> "In more recent studies Oral and Guncer "1993" reported that highly creative children were seen by Turkish teachers as being belligerent and defiant."<sup>(2)</sup>

According to Copley, creativity-fostering teachers are those who:

- Encourage students to learn independently;
- Have a co-operative, socially integrative style of teaching;
- Do not neglect mastery of factual knowledge;
- Tolerate 'sensible' or bold errors;
- Promote self-evaluation;
- Take questions seriously;
- Offer opportunities to work with varied materials under different conditions;
- Help students learn to cope with frustration and failure;
- Reward courage as much as being right.<sup>(3)</sup>

One of the strategies to enhance students' thinking in the West is to teach thinking skills to students. However, the most important strategy in my opinion was to infuse creative and critical thinking in both classroom and Curricula. The 8th. International Conference on Thinking was dedicated to promote this mission in Singapore June 1997. Moreover, too many books were published for the same purpose. Among the good ones that I came across is, "Techniques for Teaching Thinking" by Arthur Costa and Lawrence Lowery.<sup>(1)</sup>

In their book, Costa and Lowery emphasize the importance of structuring classroom for thinking, teacher-initiated questions and directions that elicit thinking and learning, teacher response behaviors that support and extend thinking and learning, and using thoughtful language in the classroom .

In structuring classroom for thinking, it is of extreme importance that lecturers need to be aware of individual differences where different students need different classroom organizational patterns, "Some students learn best individually; some learn in groups." Not only that but also in

terms of noise and quiet, degree of the light, formal and informal settings, the need to move or to be stationary, less able students do better in highly structured learning situations where direct help is generous while more able students profit from less structured situations.<sup>(2)</sup>

Teachers can cause the students to think by carefully designing the syntax of questions and statements. The teacher's manner of responding to students influence their development of self-concepts, their attitudes toward learning, their achievements, and their classroom rapport; greater than the teacher's questioning or directions.<sup>(1)</sup> The authors encourage what they call Open Responses such as waiting for one or two seconds after having asked a question before they call on another student, ask another question, or give the answer to the question themselves; being non-evaluative and non-judgmental by passively or empathetically accepting students' responses, ideas, behavior or feeling; and by asking students to clarify their responses by seeking more information.<sup>(2)</sup>

The authors stress the fact that is central to the development of an individual's cognition. Thus teachers must learn how to embed in their everyday classroom language opportunities for students to hear cognitive terminology and be presented with day-to-day challenges to think.<sup>(3)</sup>

### **Environmental Barriers**

Professor Adams states that, 'all ideas require an environment that will produce the support necessary to bring them to fruition'.<sup>(4)</sup> Adams gives an account of what are the main elements of an environment that encourages creativity by saying that 'an atmosphere of honesty, trust, and support is absolutely necessary if most people are to make the best of their conceptual abilities'.<sup>(1)</sup> He explains that :

'Most people are not happy with criticism and, to make matters worse, are somewhat unsure of the quality of their own ideas. They therefore, require a supportive environment in which to work. One of our most serious problems with students in design classes is that they hesitate to expose ideas about which they are unsure, not only to the faculty, but also to each other. Since many of their creative ideas fall into this not-sure category they hesitate to reveal them. We have to convert the class into a friendly, non- competitive, interactive situation in which people will take the risk of exposing their most impractical ideas to each other. Competition and lack of trust destroy such supportive environment'.<sup>(2)</sup>

Bringing ideas to action is even more difficult and harder job in a non supportive environment according to Professor Adams. He considers that lack of physical, economic, organizational support to bring ideas into action is also another common problem. New ideas are typically hard to bring into action. A great amount of effort is involved in perfecting an idea and then selling it. Many conceptual breakthroughs in science, for instance, have taken years of work to validate to the point where they would elicit interest from others in the scientific community. Even after the idea is fleshed out into a believable and complete form, it must be sold to an often skeptical world. This may require money and time. In addition, he concludes: "Lack of patronage is a very effective environment block." <sup>(1)</sup>

How to create an environment that kills innovation and creativity? Many authorities intentionally or unintentionally demoralize employees and do not welcome or appreciate new ways of doing things: Professor Patricia "1998"<sup>(2)</sup> has listed the following factors:

1. Negative attitude toward ideas that come from below
2. Too many approval levels "too many hierarchical authority."
3. Traditional recognition.
4. We know every thing attitude.
5. I think you do attitude .
6. Do as I say, not as I do.
7. Loafing attitudes, loafers are parasites; they take the advantages of other work.

It can be concluded that what applies to one community in this respect, applies to others as well, even though cultures may vary in terms of degree of those barriers. It can be said that in the Muslim World the situation is even worst .

### **Views of Contemporary Muslim Scholars**

In this part, I will be introducing the views of three contemporary scholars regarding the revival or reforming the Islamic Thought. These scholars are from different regions of the Muslim World. One is from the subcontinent, another from the Western part of the Muslim World, and the third from the Eastern part respectively. It is so amazing and interesting that these

scholars looked at the situation of Muslims from different angles and aspects, as we will see later in this paper. This lead us to treat their views as complementary views .

### **A. The view of Muhammad Iqbal**

Iqbal, holds a similar view of Edward de Bono and other Western intellectuals where they considers philosophy and the dominance of critical thinking as a contributing factor to hindering creativity. Iqbal states :

While Greek philosophy very much broadened the outlook of Muslim thinkers, it, on the whole, obscured their vision of the Qur'an. Socrates concentrated his attention on the human world alone. To him the proper study of man was man and not the world of plants, insects, and stars. How unlike the spirit of the Qur'an, which sees in the humble bee a recipient of Divine inspiration and constantly calls upon the reader to observe the perpetual change of winds, the alteration of day and night, the clouds, the starry heavens, and the planets swimming through infinite space! As a true disciple of Socrates, Plato despised sense-perception which, in his view, yielded mere opinion and no real knowledge. How unlike the Qur'an, which regards 'hearing' and 'sight' as the most valuable Divine gifts and declares them to be accountable to God for their activity in this world. This is what the earlier Muslim students of the Qur'an completely missed under the spell of classical speculation. They read the Qur'an in the light of Greek thought. It took them over two hundred years to perceive – though not quite clearly – that the spirit of the Qur'an was essentially anti-classical, and the result of this perception was a kind of intellectual revolt, the full significance of which has not been realized even up to the present day.<sup>(1)</sup>

Even if the emergence of certain sects was to defend Islam, however, by using the Greek weapons to do so led to negative attitudes. "On the whole, the object of the Asharite movement was simply to defend orthodox opinion with the weapons of Greek dialectic. The Mu'tazilah, conceiving religion merely as a body of doctrines and ignoring it as a vital fact, took no notice of non-conceptual modes of approaching Reality and reduced religion to a mere system of logical concepts ending in a purely negative attitude."<sup>(1)</sup>

This caused many Muslim thinkers not being aware of the main purpose of the Qur'an and fail to maintain the Islamic Civilization and its contribution to science. He states, "The main purpose of the Qur'an is to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and the universe." After quoting many verses from the Qur'an, he deduces that:

The point of these verses is that man is endowed with the faculty of naming things, that is to say, forming concepts of them, and forming concepts of them is capturing them. Thus, the character of man's knowledge is conceptual, and it is with the weapon of this conceptual knowledge that man approaches the observable aspect of Reality. The one noteworthy feature of the Qur'an is the emphasis that it lays on this observable aspect of Reality." Having quoted few other verses he continues: "No doubt, the immediate purpose of the Qur'an in this reflective observation of Nature is to awaken in man the consciousness of that which Nature is regarded a symbol. But the point to note is the general empirical attitude of the Qur'an which engendered in its followers a feeling of reverence for the actual and ultimately made them the founders of modern science."<sup>(1)</sup>

### **B. The view of Malik Bennabi**

Bennabi who is one of the most well known contemporary Muslim intellectuals discussed the issue of how Islam encouraged thinking –as a response to the Orient lists misconceptions- by asking the following question: “We should inquire whether the Qur'an was able to bring about in the Muslim society an environment suitable for the scientific spirit and to spark of the psychological impetus necessary for the acquiring and disseminating knowledge?”<sup>(2)</sup> According to Bennabi the answer to that question is: “The Qur'an was definitely able to create a new intellectual atmosphere conducive to the progress of different disciplines of sciences.”<sup>(3)</sup>

Malik Bennabi has another significant input regarding tafakkur that is the need for generating ideas in a society as a prerequisite for civilization. Lack in ideas leads to disasters and the decline of progress. He asserts: “We must consider the following truth: what befalls a society at critical turning points of its history is not the paucity of its material objects but the poverty of its ideas.”<sup>(1)</sup>



It is as if Malik anticipated the challenges of globalization faced by Muslims today when he pointed out that a society can never build its own progress with imported neither with imposed ideas by saying: “A society that does not create its fundamental ideas cannot produce what it needs for consumption nor it can produce what it needs for its industry .

A society will never build itself by imported ideas or by ideas imposed on it from outside.”<sup>(2)</sup> It has to be noted that these quotations on the realm of ideas are related to Bennabi’s view concerning cultural reconstruction and civilizational renaissance. According to him each nation aiming at achieving civilizational renaissance should have its own ideas and essential values which are extracted and based on its cultural resources and principles related to all life endeavors. In that, regard El-Mesawi states:

Bennabi considers that each society has a set of core or master ideas which constitute the centre of polarization for its vital energies. Thanks to the creative rapport, which a society establishes with its master ideas, it is able to produce what Bennabi calls expressed ideas. The function of this category of ideas is to project the master ideas in different spheres of life, thus ensuring the society’s cultural authenticity and continuity in history as well as its ability to cope with the circumstances of its historical development. Conversely, human society’s disintegration and cultural degeneration results from the break-up of such creative rapport in such a manner that its expressed ideas become mere ersatz “PI: 48/45” or dead ideas “ibid, 556/2” whose damaging impact is aggravated by the intrusion of deadly ideas. In Bennabi’s frame of analysis, deadly ideas are those ideas which are borrowed from a different civilizational context and which are not subjected to any process of critical and creative adaptation and assimilation according to the society’s archetypes or master ideas “ibid., 129L125”.<sup>(1)</sup>

### **C. The View of Professor Abdul Karim Bakkar**

According to Professor Bakkar, one of the contemporary prominent and well versed linguist and educator in order to overcome contemporary challenges there are two main tasks: the task of dealing properly with the Islamic Heritage, and the task of dealing properly with the Western thought. The right approach in dealing with the Islamic Heritage can be summarized as the following:

- To exploit the rich experience, methods, and models of our Heritage that can help us to regulate our contemporary affairs and building Islamic civilization.
- To be inspired, enlightened, and motivated by its great events and lofty experiences to pursue great achievements. Attention should be drawn to the essence rather than to forms and temporary systems of its Heritage.
- To transcend what was fulfilling immediate needs, what reflected a temporary crisis, what was a wrong response, what was due to wrong planning, or a misinterpretation of Islam, or an outcome of an atomistic view to certain issues and problems .
- To draw lessons from both success and shortcomings that existed in our Heritage in order to avoid repeating the same pitfalls that led this Ummah to relinquish its leading position.
- To analyze and critically evaluate an inherited experience overburdened with so many severe problems.

At the other end, the Islamic thought experiences extreme pressures imposed by other cultures that created contemporary civilizations. Most Muslim intellectuals made an effort to reconcile between both Islamic and Western Thoughts. This took different forms, where at one end we have the elimination of major portions of our Heritage, and the call for Islamization of knowledge at the other end.

These approaches assume that what we are trying to cope with is stable, and the derived concepts and premises from our Heritage and civilization are final. Hence, the attempt to reconcile both paradigms. Both assumptions are wrong. Culture as a whole, is complicated and it is a mix of principles, circumstances, development, symbols, challenges and various balances which does not accept integration in its deep structures level .

What we need to do to step over our present situation is to establish a creative status that integrates past experiences and contemporary challenges and needs within one cultural frame which is extracted from the divine method and our significant Heritage and civilization which in turn enables us to produce new cultural forms and models that fulfill our needs and aims and set at the same time a universal models for others to emulate and follow (1.)

### **Conclusion**

The paper discussed compared and analyzed the external barriers to creativity in both Western and Muslim societies. Culture has a strong influence on the way people think. It may hinder creativity and become an obstacle. One way to overcome

this barrier in Muslim world is to promote the good understanding of the Islamic Worldview which highly encourages creativity. Educational system is another area that requires more attention to turn it into a motivating factor towards producing creative students. Furthermore, it is necessary to build an encouraging environment for supporting and fostering creative efforts in the Muslim communities.

There is an agreement among Muslim scholars that the Muslim Ummah is encountering many contemporary challenges most of which are related to culture, education and environment and provided specific strategies and means to overcome these challenges. It is the responsibility of the Educational and Intellectual Institutions in the Muslim World to pick up these insights and ideas and work on them to bring them about and turning them into realities as an effort to improve the Muslim World and take a step towards reforming the Islamic civilization.

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